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Viewing cable 09PORTAUPRINCE530, HAITI: STUDENTS AND POLICE FACE-OFF OVER MINIMUM

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g.

#09PORTAUPRINCE530.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09PORTAUPRINCE530	2009-06-04 18:22	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Port Au Prince

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.haitiliberte.com>

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PP RUEHQU

DE RUEHPU #0530 1551822

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9989

INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 000530

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/EX, WHA/CAR

STATE PASS SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/03/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: HAITI: STUDENTS AND POLICE FACE-OFF OVER MINIMUM
WAGE BILL

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 00486

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for Reasons 1.4 (a, d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Students from two faculties of the State University of Haiti (Universite d'Etat Haiti/UEH) faced off with police the afternoon of June 3 during a student-led protest to pressure the government to increase the minimum wage. Students pelted vehicles and businesses with rocks and bottles, resulting in property damage to nearby enterprises, including a local NGO -- FOKAL, formerly headed by the Prime Minister. Riot police, armed with teargas, responded forcefully to quell the unrest and sought to protect FOKAL premises which appeared specifically targeted. Students vow to continue their protests until the minimum wage bill is promulgated. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Violence broke out June 3 during a protest by approximately seventy students from the State University's (UEH) Faculty of Human Sciences (FASCH) and the Institute of Administration, Management and International Studies (INAGHEI) who accused President Preval of defending the ''interests of the bourgeoisie'' against the interests of workers. Haitian Police (HNP) representatives reported to the RSO that neither students nor police was directly injured. The press reported June 4 that two students suffered leg injuries while fleeing the dispersion of tear gas. Seven students were arrested and later released.

¶3. (SBU) The HNP reported that one car window and a window at the FOKAL office located near the site of the protest was broken. Some reports indicate that FOKAL, an NGO that promotes cultural arts and was previously directed by Prime Minister Pierre-Louis, may have been intentionally targeted by students to express their anger at Preval and Pierre-Louis over the delay in promulgating the minimum wage law. HNP deployed riot control (CIMO) and special weapons teams (UDMO) to the area in a show of force to quell the violence and later dispatched a CIMO team to guard the FOKAL office. The students promised to continue protests until Preval signs the minimum wage bill that would raise minimum daily wages from 70 Haitian gourdes (HTG) to 200 HTG, equivalent to USD 1.75 and USD 5.00, respectively.

¶4. (C) Pierre-Louis told Ambassador June 3 that she believes the attack on FOKAL was politically inspired and her friends, including the current FOKAL Director, report she was badly shaken by the incident. Palace Secretary General Fritz Longchamps said the Palace worried that a ''racist element'' emerged during the attack and was troubled about slogans characterizing Pierre-Louis as ''a blanc'' (white person), a term sometimes used derogatorily against lighter-skinned Haitians to characterize them as ''impure.''

¶5. (C) Preval appears between a rock and a hard place on the minimum wage issue. He and Pierre-Louis discussed the impact of the increase with private sector representatives on May 6. He said he would sign the bill into law, but would request Parliament to delay the effective date until October. Preval added that his hands were tied and there was nothing he could do to otherwise change the law (Reftel). Some factory owners have criticized the planned increase in the minimum wage, stating that the scale of the increase took many of them by surprise. Preval met again with private sector representatives on June 3. He will meet June 5 with representatives from both Chambers and attempt to devise a compromise to gradually phase in the wage bill.

¶6. (C) Preval appears to now be convinced that the steep increase in wages proposed in the bill will have a detrimental impact on investment, exports and current employment. (Comment: The Senate approved the wage law on

May 5, shortly before the end of the first session of Parliament. According to the Haitian Constitution, Preval is not obliged to sign or propose modifications to a law while the Parliament is in recess. Instead, the Parliament is supposed to resend the law to the President at the opening of the next session on June 8, although it is unclear what will happen if it does not. End comment)

17. (SBU) In light of the recent violent protest by students, Preval may face greater pressure to move quickly to sign the bill into law. (Note: The RSO is monitoring reports that students are currently engaging with police and CIMO officers in the downtown areas of Champs de Mars and Avenue Christophe. Embassy will report septel any other pertinent developments as the situation evolves. End note)
SANDERSON